

For Immediate Release

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**American Lung Association Says
Status Quo Won't End Tuberculosis in the U.S.
*Institute of Medicine Unveils TB Elimination Report***

Washington, D.C., May 4, 2000 – A new report released today by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) declares that tuberculosis (TB) can be eliminated in the United States but only if new treatment and prevention strategies are employed.

“This may be our last chance to win the battle against tuberculosis,” said Ernest P. Franck, President of the American Lung Association. “We can’t continue to do the same things we’ve been doing and expect to eliminate this disease.”

Though preventable and treatable, more than 17,000 new TB cases were reported in the United States last year. Globally, TB kills three million people annually. One-third of the world’s population is infected.

After decades of continuous decreases in tuberculosis case rates in the United States, in the early 1980s the federal government prematurely declared victory against the disease and cut funding for the programs that helped bring TB under control. As a result, the disease underwent a dramatic and frightening resurgence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Fortunately, at the urging of the American Lung Association, Congress reinstated funds targeted to fight TB. Since 1993, control of the disease has been reestablished and TB rates are now at an all-time low.

“Our current success in controlling tuberculosis came at a high price and the resurgence of the disease served as a striking reminder that, as long as the disease is with us anywhere in the world, vigilance and a strong public health infrastructure will be required,” said Franck.

Today’s IOM report addresses the following questions: Is elimination of TB in this country a feasible goal? If so, how to proceed? The IOM study, commissioned by the Division of Tuberculosis Elimination of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, defines elimination as an incidence rate of less than one TB case per one million persons per year. That would translate into fewer than 300 cases in the United States per year.

The committee of experts drafting the report concluded that, yes, TB can be eliminated here.

“The continued global tuberculosis pandemic, increasing international migration and travel and changes in health care systems combine to render our nation vulnerable to a resurgence of the disease. The only certain way to prevent future, repeated upsurges is to eliminate tuberculosis, is to eliminate the disease,” Franck said.

“Unfortunately, elimination of tuberculosis is not possible with the tools we currently have available. An effective elimination campaign will require additional financial resources and a strong, durable commitment by policy-makers,” he said.

Key recommendations of the IOM report, fully supported by the American Lung Association, include:

Federal and state governments should provide adequate funding targeted specifically at TB. Increased funding is needed for research to develop improved diagnostic techniques and an effective vaccine.

Increased emphasis on the use of targeted TB testing and treatment of latent TB infection. The focus should be on identified groups that have a high incidence of TB, including persons exposed to infectious cases, persons born in high-incidence countries, prisoners and other groups at risk.

Increased U.S. participation in efforts to combat TB on a global basis. This involvement should be guided by a strategic plan developed jointly by the U.S. Agency for International Development, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the National Institutes of Health.

“In the United States, there is a long history of advocacy and social mobilization in support of tuberculosis control especially on the part of the American Lung Association. We need to intensify those efforts if the goal of eliminating tuberculosis is to be realized,” said Franck.

The American Lung Association has been fighting lung disease for nearly 100 years. With the generous support of the public and the help of volunteers, the Lung Association has seen many advances against lung disease. However, the work is not finished. As the Lung Association looks forward to its second century, it will continue to strive to make breathing easier for everyone through programs of education, community service, advocacy, and research. American Lung Association® activities are supported by donations to Christmas Seals® and other voluntary contributions. You may obtain additional information at the American Lung Association web at <http://www.lungusa.org>.

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